

The Ibis, a Magazine of general Ornithology. Edited by PHILIP LUTLEY SCLATER, M.A. Vol. I. Trübner and Co., 1859.

THE taste for Ornithology naturally arises from the sporting instincts of an Englishman. It is the love of shooting developed in a scientific direction. Nor could there easily be mentioned any other pursuit which combines in itself so many advantages as does a love of Birds and of Bird Lore, whether as a serious study or as a healthful and instructive recreation.

The geologist justly boasts his familiarity with mountain-climbing and with mountain scenery—the wide range of his studies—his broad views of science; yet the study of birds is more inviting still, as it springs more instinctively, and there is a charm in living Nature far beyond the delight in stones. And surely their prizes are well won by those who have braved alike the sun of Africa, or snows of Lapland, or pestilent tropic marsh.

No wonder that the Bird-men of England should claim a journal of their own. Entomologists have long enjoyed the privilege; and when the scarcely more numerous class of Botanists have several publications, it has always been a matter of surprise to us that the Ornithologists had none.

Therefore it was with no small pleasure that we hailed the birth of the 'Ibis.' We have watched its progress with much interest; and now that the results of the first year are before us, we must say that the new journal is very creditable to the contributors, besides being a really valuable accession to scientific literature.

It is to the enterprise of a club or fraternal union of zealous young Cantabs that we owe the 'Ibis.' Among the well-known names which we recognize, not the least is that of poor John Wolley, whose graphic delineations of the habits and haunts of his favourites must be fresh in the memory of all English lovers of birds. A sad blow is his early death to the little band who first projected the undertaking; as great a loss to those who have always followed his pen with so much delight. But there is no want of writers when we find contributions from so many different countries, all showing no mean zeal and care in observation. The high names of Sclater, Knox, Eyton, Hewitson, Newton, Gurney, Salvin, Tristram, &c., bring their reputation to the new magazine; while those who have their spurs yet to win seem determined not to be left behind in the race.

It has been objected in certain quarters that there was no need of an 'Ibis.' In answer to this we would simply ask, where could such a collection of papers have found room? Again, would they ever have been written at all?—would the expeditions narrated have been undertaken without some such stimulus and bond of fraternity?

It is true that the cultivators of foreign Ornithology are few in number. But it does not appear that the 'Ibis' can be considered wanting in interest to the purely "British" Ornithologist who only knows 'Yarrell's British Birds.' Surely such a one may with

much advantage trace the so-called "British" species to their winter retreats, or compare their habits in other lands with what has been noticed in our own. Imperfect indeed must be our acquaintance with any bird of whose existence we only know that "a specimen was once captured at York," and another "shot near Yarmouth," yet fondly counted a British bird because it has once or twice (much to its own grief) set foot upon our free soil. We wonder whether such a construction would admit the Wandering Jew to the full rights of a British subject.

No; we must never cease to follow the wandering feathered tribes, whether they go south, or east, or north. They must be put under "surveillance," traced home to their domicile, their diet ascertained, their children counted, their cottages and cradles overhauled, and an exact photograph taken on the spot. Reader, if you turn to one of poor Wolley's "photographs," such as that of the Crane in Lapland (given at p. 191), &c., you will see what we mean.

But, to speak of the more strictly scientific features of the work, it is the evident and most praiseworthy endeavour of the worshippers of the Sacred Ibis to keep up thoroughly with their subject. No pains are spared to obtain and make public the most recent observations of their Continental brethren; and we would fain hope our young 'Ibis' may bear comparison with any similar publication of its own class abroad.

It would be invidious to challenge comparison between the respective articles, where it has been the effort of all to contribute to the common weal; and we must say we think much has already been done under the able superintendence of the editor, whose name is not unknown to the readers of the 'Annals.'

After what has been said, we hope that a short analysis of the contents may suffice.

The first volume of 'The Ibis' contains articles upon the birds of the following countries:—

Central America (Sclater and Salvin), I. XII. XXIII.

St. Croix, West Indies (A. & E. Newton), VI. XIII. XXV.

Ecuador, Humming Birds (Jameson and Fraser), XLI.

Mexico, Tyrannidæ (Sclater), XLIV.

And as regards our own hemisphere, the observations relate to—

Southern Palestine (Tristram), II.

Egypt (E. C. Taylor), III.

Western Africa (Ibadan), (J. H. Gurney), XV.

Northern Africa (Tristram), V. XVI. XXIX. XLIII.

Western Spitzbergen (Evans and Sturge), XVIII.

Eastern Atlas (Salvin), XIX. XXX. XXXIV.

South-east Africa (J. H. Gurney), XXIV.

The Red Sea (Heuglin & Hartlaub), XXXIII.

Beyrout (J. H. Gurney), XXXVII.

Besides their value in a general point of view, as contributing to our knowledge of the range and economy of the species, many of these chapters contain information of high interest respecting British birds.

For instance, more than half of those noticed by Mr. E. C. Taylor in Egypt, and nearly one-half of the species observed by Mr. Tristram in Palestine, belong to the British list. Out of 357 birds found in Algeria, only fourteen have not been observed in Europe. North Africa and the Great Desert seem to be the regular winter-quarters of our familiar summer visitants. In the "oases" (p. 278), the "Willow-wrens and White-throats hop on every twig, beneath the shadow of the never-failing palm,—peaceful retreats, rarely visited by any Raptor more formidable than the Kestrel." There is a paragraph in Mr. Tristram's introductory paper (p. 157) which we must not pass without notice. Unless we have misapprehended his meaning, he seems to look upon the Bird-fauna as showing more clearly than any other class the relationship of the productions of Algeria with those of Europe. At the same time, the writer expresses his surprise that the differences are greater *specifically* when we turn to the Reptiles and Mammifers; whereas the Flora presents a striking resemblance *generically*. Now, considering that so large a proportion of the species of Birds common to both shores of the Mediterranean are migratory, would it not be safer to strike off upon both sides all the "locomotive" kinds, and then contrast the species *which nest* upon either side? Thus might the features of the Algerian "Avi-fauna" be found to correspond more nearly to those of the other classes.

To Mr. Salvin's explorations in Eastern Atlas, the same interest attaches in a British point of view; and to both we are indebted for most interesting particulars as to the breeding-haunts and habits of many birds little known in this country. The same may be said of the observations made in Spitzbergen; for, although the number of species found there was very small compared with Africa, few of them nest in Britain, though nearly all visit us.

If an Englishman is less concerned with the birds of St. Croix, it is no fault of the writers, who have treated their subject in a most pleasant and readable fashion. We can only regret that our acquaintance with the West Indian species is so limited. Still here is the *Belted Kingfisher*, a winter visitant to St. Croix, living in the Mangrove swamps, and sometimes venturing half a mile to sea in quest of fish: it seems to feed upon small crabs as well. One was seen far out at sea, flying round the steamer, in lat. $26^{\circ} 17' N.$, long. $57^{\circ} 28' W.$, in October.

The *Yellow-billed Cuckoo* breeds in St. Croix. As is well known, this bird incubates its own eggs. Mr. Newton describes these Cuckoos as remarkably tame, and affectionate to their mates.

The *Virginian Quail* has been successfully naturalized in the island. Though reputed a British bird, our climate is probably unsuitable, as the authors inform us all attempts to establish it in the eastern counties of England have failed. *Wilson's Stint*, the *Pectoral Sandpiper*, *Sooty Tern*, *Laughing Gull*, and a *Petrel* or two, complete the names which occur in Yarrell. The eggs of eight species are admirably figured by the masterly hand of Hewitson.

It is indeed of high importance to the right understanding of geographical distribution, and especially of migration, that we should

have a series of trustworthy notes from whatever countries are inhabited or traversed by the migratory tribes. We feel sure of this that migration is far more universal among birds than is generally supposed. Mr. A. E. Knox has already done good service by calling attention to this, as well as by his own excellent observations. It is to be hoped that no English Ornithologist will think his time and pains ill bestowed upon a subject so promising and so inexhaustible. Too little is known of the *direction* taken by the various migrants; often in spring, they appear to follow quite a different route to that of the autumn. How are they affected by prevailing winds?—by clear or foggy weather? How long are they on their way? At how many stages do they linger?—and are they much or little delayed by changes of temperature, when they have once set out? All these are most interesting points; and we trust some light may eventually be thrown upon these questions as the number of observers becomes every year increased.

Mr. Tristram, worthily following the example set by Mr. Wolley, has been the discoverer of the native haunts and nests of several birds whose eggs were previously little or not at all known.

The study of eggs is one essential to the Ornithologist. It is too true that instances are not wanting of collectors who are content to possess the eggs as so many pretty objects, hardly knowing anything of the birds themselves; and no little mischief has been done in this way by the stimulus given to the extirpation of rare species. But the scientific student is compelled to commence his investigations “*ab ovo*,” and thus he is led to detect the really native haunts of his birds. There are, in the present volume, two excellent chapters bearing upon the study of eggs,—one by the veteran Hewitson, the other a review of two recent works upon American and German Oology. As usual with the German writers, we find Herr Bädeker too much inclined to found new species upon slight differences, and fortifying himself in this by the inverted system of reasoning from egg to bird, instead of from bird to egg (p. 404). It occurs to us that the terms “*European*” and “*British*” are somewhat too loosely applied to eggs when they belong to birds which, it is true, must be included in the respective Faunas of Europe and Britain, but whose eggs there is no reason to expect we shall ever find upon European or British soil. In what sense the egg of the American White-winged Crossbill can be called “*British*,” it has always puzzled us to discover, though it is very likely the Americans may have some day to thank an Ibis-worshipper for leading him to its “*cunabula*.”

When we read that the Knot and Sanderling, so well known upon our shores, have hitherto baffled the utmost pursuit of their nests, when we hear that at the North-east Cape, in latitude 78° N., these birds were still pressing onwards, we are almost compelled to ask with the writer may there not be some circumpolar land (or islands) unvisited as yet, except by these adventurous Sand-pipers? At the same time, we think too much stress should not be laid upon the negative evidence of one observer, posted upon an isolated point of that vast region, whether his station was unfavourable from its

physical features, or whether we may suppose the birds migrating along the parallels of latitude.

Separate chapters are devoted to the breeding of the Smew and Crane (Wolley); Nesting-places of the Frigate Bird (G. C. Taylor); Harlequin Duck (a critical article, by A. Newton); Nesting of Black Woodpecker (W. H. Simpson); Nesting of Eagle Owl in Captivity (Edward Fountain); White's Thrush as observed in Warwickshire (R. F. Tomes); Black-winged Stilt in Sussex (A. E. Knox); Breeding of Mutton Bird (*Puffinus obscurus*) (R. Elwes); Pel's Owl (J. H. Gurney): all interesting and very readable articles.

Under the head of the "general subject" may be quoted a paper on the Preparation of Birds' Skeletons, by Mr. Eyton; Mr. Tomes on the genera *Oreocincla*, *Turdus*, and *Merula*, and Mr. Wallace's remarks upon the Geographical Distribution of Birds, which those who are interested in the subject will do well to compare with Mr. Sclater's in the 'Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnæan Society' (vol. ii. p. 13), as well as with some of the remarks preliminary to different articles in the 'Ibis.'

The new species of Birds described in this volume amount to some twenty. We could wish to see them collected into a separate appendix at the end of each year.

There are given fifteen beautifully coloured plates to illustrate this volume: three of these, representing eggs, are from the pencil of Hewitson; others of the drawings are by J. Wolf,—sufficient guarantee that everything has in this respect been done to give the new periodical a high character. Photography appears to have been successfully employed by Dr. Brewer in copying the exact markings of eggs.

Each Number concludes with a summary of recent Ornithological publications, English and Foreign, a few paragraphs of short notices, extracts from correspondence, &c. If anything be still wanting when so much has been accomplished, we could wish to see the 'Ibis' becoming the registrar of the more important observations made upon British birds upon our own soil: but we are convinced that it is only needful for the Journal to become better known to ensure this result.

We may now conclude our pleasant task by heartily recommending the 'Ibis' to every one who takes any interest in birds, whether British or foreign, and with the hope that its circulation among the fraternity may soon double the number of accurate and diligent observers. He who would be a true Ornithologist must have no delight in ease or in mere shooting. He should be a kind of scientific Gipsy: a brown-faced, hardy, out-o'-doors man; a quick shot; a dauntless climber; an earnest student; a practical bird-stuffer, with a dash of the author: and if to this is added a warm feeling for the beauties of Nature in all her forms, we envy the man who is such, and we commend him especially to the worshippers of the Ibis as a worthy fellow-craftsman. Such, we know, are many Englishmen, and we trust their numbers may be ever on the increase.